

08/28/00

A)

UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

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Attorney Docket No. 206357

First Named Inventor Houis

Express Mail No. EL303750372US

jc862 U.S. PTO

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APPLICATION ELEMENTS

1. ☒ Utility Transmittal Form
2. ☒ Specification (including claims and abstract) [Total Pages 10]
3. ☒ Drawings [Total Sheets 1]
4. ☒ Combined Declaration and Power of Attorney [Total Pages 3]
 - a. ☒ Unexecuted
 - b. ☐ Copy from prior application
[Note Box 5 below]
 - i. ☐ Deletion of Inventor(s) Signed statement attached deleting inventor(s) named in the prior application
5. ☐ Incorporation by Reference: The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which a copy of the oath or declaration is supplied under Box 4b is considered as being part of the disclosure of the accompanying application and is hereby incorporated by reference therein.
6. ☐ Microfiche Computer Program
7. ☐ Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission
 - a. ☐ Computer Readable Copy
 - b. ☐ Paper Copy
 - c. ☐ Statement verifying above copies

ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS

8. ☐ Assignment Papers (cover sheet and document(s))
9. ☐ Power of Attorney
10. ☐ English Translation Document (if applicable)
11. ☐ Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)
 - ☐ Form PTO-1449
 - ☐ Copies of References
12. ☐ Preliminary Amendment
13. ☒ Return Receipt Postcard (Should be specifically itemized)
14. ☐ Small Entity Statement(s)
 - ☐ Enclosed
 - ☐ Statement filed in prior application; status still proper and desired
15. ☒ Certified Copy of Priority Document(s)
16. ☐ Other:

17. If a **CONTINUING APPLICATION**, check appropriate box and supply the requisite information in (a) and (b) below:
- (a) ☐ Continuation ☐ Divisional ☐ Continuation-in-part of prior application Serial No. _____
Prior application information: Examiner _____; Group Art Unit: _____
- (b) Preliminary Amendment: Relate Back - 35 USC §120. The Commissioner is requested to amend the specification by inserting the following sentence before the first line:
"This is a ☐ continuation ☐ divisional of copending application(s)
☐ Application No. _____, filed on _____, and which designates the U.S."
☐ International Application, filed on _____, and which designates the U.S."

APPLICATION FEES

BASIC FEE				\$690.00
CLAIMS	NUMBER FILED	NUMBER EXTRA	RATE	
Total Claims	17 -20=	0	x \$18.00	\$0
Independent Claims	3 -3=	0	x \$78.00	\$0
<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Dependent Claim if applicable			+ \$260.00	\$0
Total of above calculations =				\$690.00
Reduction by 50% for filing by small entity =				\$()
<input type="checkbox"/> Assignment fee if applicable			+ \$40.00	\$
TOTAL =				\$690.00

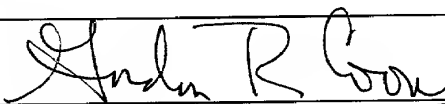
UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

Attorney Docket No. 206357

19. ☐ Please charge my Deposit Account No. 12-1216 in the amount of \$
20. ☒ A check in the amount of \$690.00 is enclosed.
21. The Commissioner is hereby authorized to credit overpayments or charge any additional fees of the following types to Deposit Account No. 12-1216:
- a. ☒ Fees required under 37 CFR §1.16.
- b. ☒ Fees required under 37 CFR §1.17.
22. ☐ The Commissioner is hereby generally authorized under 37 CFR §1.136(a)(3) to treat any future reply in this or any related application filed pursuant to 37 CFR §1.53 requiring an extension of time as incorporating a request therefor, and the Commissioner is hereby specifically authorized to charge Deposit Account No. 12-1216 for any fee that may be due in connection with such a request for an extension of time.


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Certificate of Mailing Under 37 CFR §1.10

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Brian D. Sandstrom		August 25, 2000
Name of Person Signing	Signature	Date

UTILITY (Rev. 6/29/2000)

[illegible]

ASSIGNEES:

SHORT TITLE:

FORMAL TITLE:

APPLICATION NO:

FILED:

PRIORITY CLAIMED:

Filed on 5th January 2000

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Agents for the Applicants

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

The invention relates to blow-moulded articles and blow-moulding methods for producing them. Articles embodying the invention and to be described in more detail below are bellows arrangements for protecting moving parts in the mechanism of motor vehicles.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the invention, there is provided an article produced by blow-moulding of a parison or preform, and including a separate element having an opening, the separate element being joined to the parison or preform during blowing of the parison or preform, and in which the blown material of the parison or preform enters the opening and is itself formed with an opening during and by blowing of the parison or preform so that the interior of the article is in communication with the interior of the separate element.

According to the invention, there is further provided a flexible bellows arrangement made of thermoplastics material by blow-moulding a parison or preform and having a connector element with a hollow passage therethrough which is secured at a predetermined position to the wall of the bellows to enable a connection to be made to the interior of the bellows through its wall, the connector element being sealed and secured in position by blow-moulded material of the parison or preform which has entered the hollow passage of the connector element to weld the material of the parison or preform to the material of the connector element and to form an opening through the material of the parison or preform which communicates with the hollow passage.

According to the invention, there is also provided a method of securing a separate element having an opening therein to the wall of an article which is produced by blowing a parison or preform, comprising the steps of separately producing the separate element, placing it in a mould which receives the parison or preform, and blowing the parison or preform in the mould so that material of the parison or preform enters the opening of the separate

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element and secures the element to the article, the blowing of the material of the parison or preform into the opening of the separate element forming an aperture in the parison or preform at that position whereby to form a communication between the interior of the article and the opening of the separate element.

In embodiments of the invention to be described, therefore, connector elements can easily be sealingly welded to products such as bellows made by extrusion blow-moulding or injection blow-moulding.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Bellows arrangements embodying the invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying diagrammatic drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a cross-section through one of the bellows arrangements;

Figure 2 is an enlarged view of the portion of Figure 1 shown at II; and

Figure 3 is an end view of part of a connector shown in Figure 2, looking in the direction of the arrow III.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The bellows arrangement 10 shown in Figures 1 and 2 comprises a small diameter fixing collar 12 at one end and a larger diameter fixing collar 14 at the opposite end, with a plurality of bellows turns 16 integrally extending between the two collars. In use, the fixing collars 12 and 14 are used to attach the bellows to two relatively movable parts of a mechanism (not shown) which is to be protected in a motor vehicle. The collars 12 and 14 may be fixed to different parts of the mechanism by suitable circumferentially extending clamping rings. The bellows protects the mechanism from ingress of water,

dirt and other contamination.

In one particular application of the bellows 10, two of them are respectively mounted to protect the ends of a steering rack of the steering mechanism on the vehicle. Thus, the steering mechanism may comprise a steering box operated directly by the driver's steering wheel or through the intermediary of a power steering arrangement. A steering rack extends outwardly in opposite directions from each side of the steering box and is moved axially in one or the other direction by the steering box, in response to steering action by the driver, the opposite ends of the rack being connected to turn the steerable wheels of the vehicle. In use, a bellows 10 extends from one side of the steering box, with its larger diameter fixing collar 14 being secured to the steering box where the steering rack extends outwardly therefrom. The smaller diameter collar 12 of the bellows 10 is secured to the distal end of the rack.

At the opposite side of the steering box, from which the second end of the rack protrudes, a second bellows 10 is secured, with its smaller diameter collar 12 fixed to that distal end of the steering rack.

The two bellows bellows 10 thus protect the two end portions of the rack and flexibly accommodate the axial movement of the bellows.

As the rack moves to and fro, in order to carry out desired steering action, the two bellows 10 will be alternately compressed and expanded. It is therefore necessary to accommodate the resultant changes in pressure in the two bellows. If this is not done, excessive pressure may rupture the bellows. In order to deal with this problem, it is known to interconnect the interiors of the two bellows. In this way, when one bellows is contracted by movement of the rack, the increased pressure within the bellows is transmitted to the interior of the other bellows which will at the same time be expanded.

In accordance with a feature of the bellows being described, this interconnection between

the two bellows at opposite ends of the steering rack is implemented by means of an interconnection tube (not shown) which extends sealingly between two connectors, of which one is shown at 20 in Figures 1 and 2. The connector 20 is L-shaped in form, comprising a relatively long hollow tubular part 22 and a relatively short hollow tubular part 24. Each part 22,24 has an open end 22A,24A. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the connector 20 is secured in position on the bellows 10 so that the end 24A is attached to the wall of the bellows adjacent the larger diameter collar 14 and with the hollow interior of the portion 24 thus open to the interior 25 of the bellows. The portion 24 of the connector 20 thus extends radially of the axis of the bellows and the portion 22 of the connector extends in an axial direction.

The connector 20 of the bellows 10 at the other end (not shown) of the steering rack is mounted similarly on that bellows, and the two ends 22A of the connectors are interconnected by the interconnection tube (not shown) which is preferably rigid and fits inside the hollow tubular parts 22 of the connectors 20 of the two bellows.

The bellows of the form shown in the Figures need to be produced in large quantities using mass-production techniques. A usual way of producing the bellows is by a blow-moulding technique using thermoplastic material. A parison or preform of thermoplastic material in a suitable mould is blown to produce the bellows (for simplicity, the term "parison" will be used alone in the following description and in the claims but is intended to include "preform" where injection blow-moulding is used). It is desirable that the connector 20 be secured to the bellows 10 in an efficient manner, necessitating the minimum number of operations. In accordance with a feature of the bellows being described, the connector 20 is separately produced, such as from relatively stiff thermoplastics material by a suitable moulding operation. It is then placed in the mould which is used for blow-moulding the bellows 10. The parison of thermoplastics material is formed in the interior of this mould and then blown internally to produce the form of the bellows. This blowing action blows the material of the parison into the end 24A of the portion 24 of the connector 20 and thus sealingly secures the parison to the connector

20 by welding the material of the parison to the material of the connector 20. Simultaneously, a hole is formed through a circular wall portion 26 of the parison by the blowing operation which thus connects the interior 25 of the bellows to the interior of the connector 20, all as shown in Figure 2.

The connector 20 is very firmly secured to the parison. The welding operation forms a very strong welded bond between the material of the connector 20 and the material of the parison. In addition, a mechanical bond is formed between the connector and the parison by the material of the parison where it enters the end 24A of the connector 20.

The arrangement described and illustrated herein is therefore advantageous over known arrangements in which connectors similar to the connector 20 are mounted on the bellows by a glueing operation, which is complex, requiring several different operations including the formation of a hole through the wall of the bellows. The arrangement described and illustrated herein is also advantageous over arrangements in which the connector 20 is moulded integrally with the bellows. Such arrangements are complex because it is necessary to carry out a separate operation to form a hole through the wall of the bellows.

In the arrangement described and illustrated herein, the only condition that the materials of the tubular part 24 and the parison have to satisfy is chemical compatibility. This enables various modifications to be easily made. For example, the connector 20 could be relatively stiff, and the interconnection tube (for connecting the connectors 20 of the two bellows) could be flexible. However, other modifications are also possible.

The arrangement illustrated is advantageous in that the connector 20 can be very precisely located relative to the wall of the bellows, because it is positioned within the mould itself, or it can be very precisely located relative to the blown part of the wall of the bellows in the case where the bellows is only partially blown.

As shown in Figure 2, the end 24A of the connector portion 24 can be formed with a circular recess 28 for receiving the material of the parison as it is blown into the end 24A.

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Figure 3 shows an end view of the connector 20, viewed in the direction of the arrow III of Figure 2, before it is positioned in the mould. It has a base 30 and ribs 32,32 which support the tubular parts 22,24. The blowing operation which blows the parison into the form of the bellows is thus arranged to produce a small flat area in the generally circular wall portion 26. The base 30 (Figure 3) of the connector 20 is received on the outside of this flat area. On the inside of the bellows, the inside surface of this flat area merges into the inside of the circular wall portion 26 as shown at 34 (in Figure 2 but not in Figure 1).

It will be appreciated that the connector 20 can be situated at any desired position on the external wall of the bellows. The connector 20 can have any desired rigidity.

Although the above description explains how a connector 20 can be secured to the wall of a bellows 10, it will be appreciated that the same process can be used in many other applications where it is desired to attach a connector or other part having an opening, to the external surface or wall of a part which is produced by a blow moulding operation.

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WHAT IS CLAIMED IS

1. In combination, an article produced by blow-moulding of a parison and a separate element having an opening,

the separate element being joined to the parison during blowing of the parison, and

the blown material of the parison enters the opening and is itself formed with an opening during and by blowing of the parison so that the interior of the article is in communication with the interior of the separate element.
2. The combination according to claim 1, in which the parison is of thermoplastics material.
3. The combination according to claim 1, in which the separate element is made of moulded thermoplastics material.
4. The combination according to claim 1, in which the opening of the separate element is shaped with a formation to receive the blown material of the parison.
5. The combination according to claim 4, in which the formation is a circular recess.
6. The combination according to claim 1, in which the article is in the form of a flexible bellows, and in which the separate element is a connector enabling an external connection to be made to the interior of the bellows.
7. The combination according to claim 1, in which the separate element is joined to the parison by welding and mechanical bonding.
8. A flexible bellows arrangement made of thermoplastics material by blow-

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moulding a parison and having a connector element with a hollow passage therethrough which is secured at a predetermined position to the wall of the bellows to enable a connection to be made to the interior of the bellows through its wall in which,

the connector element is sealed and secured in position by blow-moulded material of the parison which has entered the hollow passage of the connector element to weld the material of the parison to the material of the connector element and to form an opening through the material of the parison which communicates with the hollow passage.

9. A bellows arrangement according to claim 8, in which the connector element is made of moulded thermoplastics material.
10. A bellows arrangement according to claim 8, in which the connector element is of hollow tubular form.
11. A bellows arrangement according to claim 10, in which the connector element comprises a first hollow tubular portion extending generally radially of the bellows and a second integral hollow tubular portion extending generally parallel to the axis of the bellows.
12. A bellows arrangement according to claim 8, in combination with a second bellows arrangement according to claim 8, the interiors of the two bellows arrangements being connected together by means of their connector elements.
13. A method of securing a separate element having an opening therein to the wall of an article which is produced by blowing a parison, comprising the steps of

separately producing the separate element,

placing it in a mould which receives the parison, and

blowing the parison in the mould so that material of the parison enters the opening of the separate element and secures the element to the article,

the blowing of the material of the parison into the opening of the separate element forming an aperture in the parison at that position whereby to form a communication between the interior of the article and the opening of the separate element.

14. A method according to claim 13, including the step of producing a formation in the separate element at its opening for receiving the blown material of the parison.
15. A method according to claim 13, in which the article is a flexible bellows.
16. A method according to claim 13, in which the material of the parison is thermoplastic material.
17. A method according to claim 13, in which the separate element is secured to the article by welding and mechanical bonding.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A flexible bellows, such as for protecting the end of a longitudinally movable steering rack, has a hollow connector mounted on it adjacent its larger diameter fixing collar. The connector enables a connection to be made from the interior of the bellows through a similar connector on a second bellows covering the opposite end of the rack and thus to the interior of the second bellows. As the rack moves to and fro, compressing one bellows and expanding the other, the increased pressure in the compressed bellows is automatically transferred to the expanded bellows. The connector is pre-produced, such as from relatively rigid material by a moulding operation, and then placed in the mould which is used for producing the bellows. A parison or preform of thermoplastics material is placed in the mould and then blown to form the bellows. This operation forces some of the blown material of the parison or preform into the open end of the connector, which at the same time secures the connector to the bellows and forms an opening through the wall of the bellows to connect the interior of the bellows to the interior of the connector.

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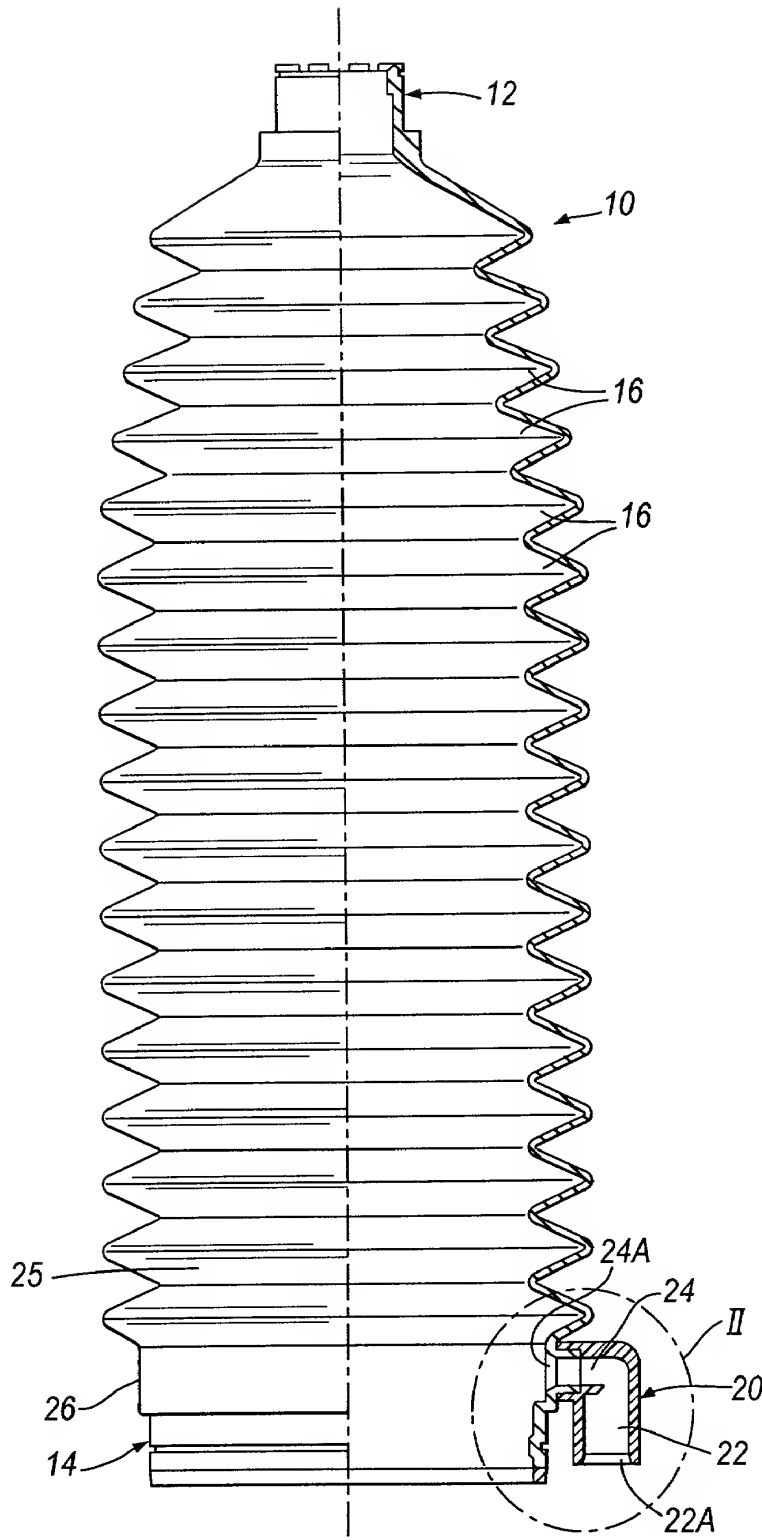


Fig. 1

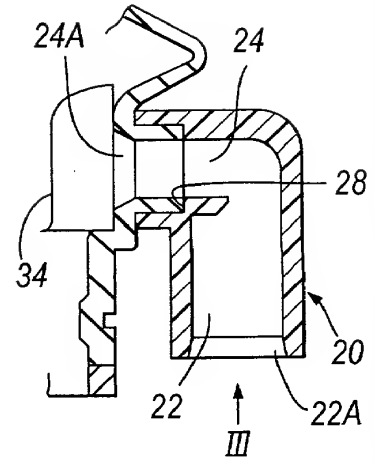


Fig. 2

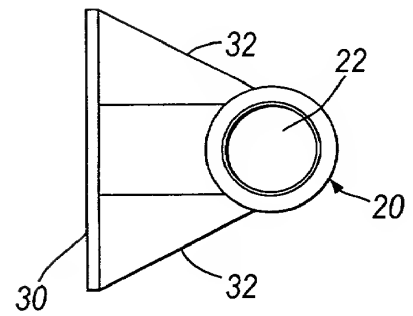


Fig. 3

COMBINED DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY

As below named inventor, I hereby declare that

This declaration is of the following type:

- ☒ original ☐ design ☐ supplemental
☐ national stage of PCT
☐ divisional ☐ continuation ☐ continuation-in-part

My residence, post office address, and citizenship are as stated below next to my name. I believe I am the original, first, and sole inventor (*if only one name is listed below*) or an original, first, and joint inventor (*if plural names are listed below*) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled:

"Blow-Moulded Articles and Blow-Moulding Methods for Producing them"

the specification of which:

- ☒ is attached hereto.
☐ was as filed on _____ Serial No. _____ and was amended on _____ (*if applicable*).
☐ was filed by Express Mail No. _____, as Serial No. *not known yet*, and was amended on _____ (*if applicable*).
☐ was described and claimed in PCT International Application No. _____ filed on _____ and as amended under PCT Article 19 on _____ (*if any*).

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claim(s), as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to the examination of this application in accordance with Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, § 1.56.

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code, § 119 of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate or of any PCT international application(s) designating at least one country other than the United States of America listed below and have also identified below any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate or any PCT international application(s) designating at least one country other than the United States of America filed by me on the same subject matter having a filing date before that of the application(s) of which priority is claimed.

COUNTRY	APPLICATION	DATE OF FILING (day,month,year)	PRIORITY CLAIMED UNDER 35 USC 119			
United Kingdom	0000102.4	5 Jan., 2000	X	YES		NO
				YES		NO
				YES		NO

I hereby claim the benefit pursuant to Title 35, United States Code, § 119(e) of the following United States provisional application(s):

Sig. [Signature]

PRIOR U.S. PROVISIONAL APPLICATIONS CLAIMING THE BENEFIT UNDER 35 USC 119(e)	
APPLICATION NO.	DATE OF FILING

I hereby claim the benefit under Title 35, United States Code, § 120 of any United States application(s) or PCT international application(s) designating the United States of America that is/are listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in that/those prior application(s) in the manner provided by the first paragraph of Title 35, United States Code, § 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose material information as defined in Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, § 1.56 which occurred between the filing date of the prior application(s) and the national or PCT international filing date of this application.

PRIOR U.S. APPLICATIONS OR PCT INTERNATIONAL APPLICATIONS DESIGNATING THE U.S. FOR BENEFIT UNDER 35 USC 120					
U.S. APPLICATIONS			Status (check one)		
U.S. APPLICATIONS	U.S. FILING DATE		PATENTED	PENDING	ABANDONED
1. 0 /					
2. 0 /					
3. 0 /					
PCT APPLICATIONS DESIGNATING THE U.S.			Status (check one)		
PCT APPLICATION No.	PCT FILING DATE	U.S. SERIAL NOS. ASSIGNED (if any)	PATENTED	PENDING	ABANDONED
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DETAILS OF FOREIGN APPLICATIONS FROM WHICH PRIORITY CLAIMED UNDER 35 USC 119 FOR ABOVE LISTED U.S./PCT APPLICATIONS				
ABOVE APPLN. NO.	COUNTRY	APPLICATION NO.	DATE OF FILING (day,month,yr)	DATE OF ISSUE (day,month,yr)
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

As a named inventor, I hereby appoint the following attorneys to prosecute this application and transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith.

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I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true, that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true, that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code, and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

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